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ABSTRACT

Arizona is approaching educational reform through the establishment of a teacher incentive program which completely restructures the way teachers are classified and rewarded. The Center for Excellence in Education at Northern Arizona University was mandated by the state legislature to evaluate district plans over a 5-year test period and to report summative findings on the Arizona Career Ladder Pilot Project. Although the research process, involving observation, data analysis, and evaluation, is not yet complete, some positive trends are becoming apparent. Major areas of strength reported by 1,935 educators include: (1) teacher input (program ownership); (2) salary; (3) mobility; (4) professionalism; (5) evaluation; (6) improved instruction; and (7) staff inservice. The trends and events in Arizona are also being watched by other states and the nation in general for implications and possible applications to other areas. (CB)

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CAREER LADDER FACTS ABSTRACT

AND

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS:

Will it Work in Arizona?

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The Arizona Career Ladder Program

Facts Abstract

Career Ladders Defined: Career Ladders is a teacher incentive program which completely restructures the way teachers are classified and rewarded. No longer will teachers be paid based on assumed competencies as a result of years of experience and additional college credit. Instructional competency and classroom performance are the major criteria for salary determination. Characteristically, three or four teaching levels are identified in a career ladder plan. Each step up the ladder is based on systematic evaluation and brings increased pay and higher level responsibilities such as mentoring or serving as formative evaluators. Unlike merit pay plans in which teachers simply receive bonuses for a job well done, a career incentive program allows outstanding teachers to receive higher compensation and to utilize their talents toward further professionalizing their career.

Legislation: Through S.B. 1095 (1984), S.B. 1336 (1985) and S.B. 1384 (1986) the Arizona Career Ladder Pilot Project was initiated. These bills outlined minimum criteria to be followed by districts as they developed (and are implementing) career ladder programs for teachers. These criteria included in part, evidence of teacher input and support, expanded evaluation procedures, a completely restructured salary schedule and plans for continued professional advancement of teachers and specific criteria for that advancement. The bills also mandated that The Center for Excellence in Education at NAU conduct research over the five year pilot project.

Pilot Districts: Presently, 16 districts are in some phase of piloting a district developed career ladder for the years 1984-85 through 1989-90. The original "Phase I Districts" include: Amphitheater, Apache Junction, Cave Creek, Flowing Wells, Kyrene, Peoria and Sunnyside. "Phase 2 Districts" are those who will have their career ladder plans fully implemented by June 1987. These include the following: Catalina Foothills, Mesa and Window Rock. "Phase 3 Districts" incorporated an evaluation model originally initiated by A.E.A. These districts include: Creighton, Dysart, Ganado, Litchfield, Mammoth-San Manuel, and Fountain Hills serving as an alternate. After more detailed career ladder planning, this last phase of districts will receive final approval during June 1987. Over 7,000 educators are presently involved in some stage of career ladder program development.

Research: The Arizona Career Ladder Research & Evaluation Project was created at NAU to conduct research on the five year pilot project and to evaluate the relative successes of each district's program. Researchers from NAU in cooperation with those from the U of A and ASU are collecting a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. This is being accomplished through a variety of observation and measurement procedures including, surveys, district self-reports, a student achievement index, school records, direct observation and personal interviews. Based on yearly reports of research findings and evaluation, the Joint Legislative Committee on Career Ladders will make decisions concerning statewide implementation in 1990.

INCENTIVE PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS:

Will it Work in Arizona?

The Theoretical Beginning. Theoretically, career ladder teacher incentive programs will improve education and the teaching profession; they will help in recruiting, retaining and motivating high quality teachers; improve teacher evaluation systems, instruction and morale; enhance student academic achievement and much much more.

Even though these assumptions are being made, at this point, we don't have much evidence which substantiates these claims. Of course, the theory that "the world is round," took a great deal of research, testing and observation before man was able to be comfortable with the concept and the same is the case with the actual or realistic effects of career ladder programs. While working toward a possible solution, it is gratifying to know that sixteen forward looking school districts in Arizona are well into various experimental phases of testing the concept. They are leading the way in testing career ladder program concepts to determine if they accomplish what we think they can or hope they will.

Change & Reform. Like every attempt at major change and reform the Arizona Career Ladder Teacher Incentive Program generates many theories and unanswered questions. Among them are the following: Can teachers and school systems change from a structure which pays teachers for similar types of work based on experience and college credit hours, to one where teachers are rewarded for performing at different competency levels and for being outstanding? Does the career ladder teacher incentive program really attract, motivate and retain high quality teachers over the long term? Will adequate funding continue to be there? Can evaluation procedures undergo substantial enough change to assure fairness, objectivity and be an effective tool for instructional improvement? Are training and time resources sufficient to meet the need? Will the renewed emphasis on instruction be positive enough to transcend some of the other difficulties which are inevitable? Is there a "willingness" and are there the capabilities among all interests involved to effect "real" change?

Testing The National Movement. The educational reform movement during the 1980s has brought several new state and national reports calling for change. Approximately 30 states are now implementing statewide programs using various approaches including funding of local plans, legislative mandates and pilot-testing models. As a result of these extensive policy and funding moves, there is a strong indication that major components of teacher incentive programs are here to stay.

Arizona is approaching this educational change movement through a "pilot-test" procedure established by the State Legislature. The Center for Excellence in Education, at Northern Arizona University, was mandated to evaluate district plans over the five year test period and to report summative findings in the Fall of 1989. By that time the pilot program will involve over 7,000 educators, costing a projected 8 million dollars per year, which could increase to 60 million if the program is implemented statewide.

The research and evaluation process is being conducted on three different levels. First, the pure research aspect involves the "theory-hypothesis level." Questions are formulated regarding whether career ladder plans really make a difference. Do they really have an effect, for example, on teacher morale, instruction and recruiting, retaining and motivating high quality teachers? To objectively answer these kinds of questions, the second level of operation is to make "observations" using surveys, reports, interviews, etc., which result in large amounts of qualitative and quantitative data. These data are then analyzed providing answers to questions or hypotheses. The third level of responsibility and operation is "evaluation." This level is crucial to program change. Program evaluation establishes the responsibility of analyzing research results and arriving at conclusions in the form of value judgments. With confidence, we will be able to say if career ladders has a positive or negative effect on any of the many factors or questions and to what degree.

The research phase (theory & observation) is an objective, "amoral," one in which no value judgments are made, just observations of what is, analysis and reporting of results. The theory and observation levels of operation add to knowledge and are extremely important to get at the "truth." The research component is one of the unique aspects of the Arizona approach. This process has seldom been accomplished on such a large scale in school district organizations. Usually opportunities for reform are accompanied only by a plan for program evaluation, or at times no plan at all, just proceding on feelings, general attitudes and interests of the establishment. A combination utilizing both research and evaluation procedures will demonstrate a "thoroughness" which is desirable in approaching such complex and difficult changes affecting so many people.

Positive Changes. As a result of the career ladder movement in Arizona, some positive trends are already becoming evident. If one looks at the composite returns (even at this early date), they show pilot district strength to be apparent in seven distinct areas. In priority order, the seven major areas of strengths as reported by 1,935 educators, are the following: (1) Teacher Input (ownership) - improved communication with administrators and input with career ladder program development and implementation, (2) Salary - increased financial reward, (3) Mobility -

expanded opportunities for career advancement, (4) Professionalism - allows teachers to do their best and excel - teachers helping teachers develop (mentoring), (5) Evaluation - clarifies competencies and expectations for instructional improvement - sets high standards - requires development of qualified evaluators, (6) Aids Instruction - helps retain good teachers and remove poor ones - focus is placed on teaching and learning, and (7) Staff Inservice - focuses administrative support on teaching needs & instructional training - enhances inservice programs.

The career ladder pilot program study is being assisted by a wide variety of groups and organizations, the pilot districts themselves, the Arizona Education Association, the three state universities, the Joint Legislative Committee on Career Ladders, and others. A very positive factor and major uniqueness of the program is the fact that professional teacher organizations and universities are working directly with program study and development to help provide a quality test of the career ladder concept.

Outside Interests. Arizona's approach to the career ladder teacher incentive concept is being internally and externally observed with anticipation and interest by several sources. Internally, several school districts, state and local school boards, legislators, teachers, administrators and many others have been closely watching the unfolding process. The following examples will show that externally, several states, organizations and professional research groups have been interested in the Arizona process and accomplishments.

The National Center for Policy Research, out of the Rand Corporation, has targeted Arizona to determine if policy changes can be effected by testing pilot programs and reporting findings which, in turn, influence legislative action. In the past, most legislation tends to have been effected by special interest groups or a particular political philosophy rather than through any objective influence from research or evaluation.

Time For Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, developed by the National Governor's Association, Center for Policy Research and Analysis, has mentioned two states to watch in terms of career ladder program development. They point out that Arizona and Tennessee are effecting change and reform to "attract, train, and reward excellent school leaders" through revised "career structure" concepts. Further information in this report, indicated that Tennessee's approach is to implement a statewide system by legislation. Arizona's is a "five year experiment . . . to design career ladders" wherein, "Teachers are involved in the design and improved student achievement is one design criterion." The importance of this matter is that Tennessee and Arizona are using very different types of approachs to implementation of teacher incentive programs. It implies important research questions.

For example, Tennessee has a centrally planned, statewide mandated program which by law is being implemented in all districts. While there have been reports of great successes in instructional improvement, there are other indications that the non-tested statewide approach may not be the most positive way to proceed. Arizona is pilot-testing individually tailored programs, through a process of formative evaluation and development over a long period of time. We are looking forward to comparing future successes of these two distinctly different approaches in effecting change and reform.

Administrators in Arizona will be interested in the fact that the very prestigious National Academy of School Executives, a branch of the American Association of School Administrators, has chosen Arizona for their summer seminar on career ladder teacher incentive programs. The conference will be held in Flagstaff during the second week of June, featuring extensive Arizona school district and research center input.

The Future. The test of the career ladder program will face major challenges because it is an attack on many "sacred cows." People obtain and maintain strong feelings and emotions for tradition. Changing attitudes of "this is the way we do it here" or "its the way we've always done it," is appearing to be even a much greater obstacle than previously predicted. The thing that makes the difference between failure and success is in the leadership and its willingness and desire, at all levels, to effect real change.

One thing that is certain, there is no lack of challenge in our present endeavor to try to answer some major questions about the effects of career ladders on the State and in school systems. There is a certainty, in the process of change and development, that we can anticipate many more societal elements being affected. This will cause new questions to arise and require attention toward possible solutions. "Change in one area effects change in others; its dynamic and a never ending challange."